THE NEW
INDIAN EXPRESS
BENGALURU • THURSDAY • FEBRUARY 17, 2022 • ₹9.00 • PAGES 22 • LATE CITY EDITION

JAB-O-METER
TAKE YOUR SHOT
February15 37,68,847 doses
February16 31,12,641 doses
TOTAL DOSES: 1,76,10,80,245

NATIONWIDE	FEB 15	FEB 16
Fresh cases	38,409	30,615
Recoveries	3,82,580	85,988
Deaths	494	574

KARNATAKA	FEB 15	FEB 16
Fresh cases	1,405	1,894
Recoveries	5,762	5,418
Deaths	26	24

COVID CASES DOWN, CENTRE WANTS STATES TO LIFT CURBS

The Union health secretary has urged them to lift the restrictions imposed in the wake of third Covid wave

'PANDEMIC ON DOWNWARD TREND SINCE JAN 21'

In a letter to chief secretaries and chief administrators of all states and UTs on Wednesday, Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan noted the pandemic is showing a sustained declining trend since January 21. As such, all additional Covid restrictions imposed at state-level points of entries can be lifted so that movement of people is not hampered

CONSIDERABLE DECLINE IN FRESH CASES

- The states and UTs must, however, monitor the trajectory of cases and spread of infection and follow the broad strategy of Test-Track-Treat-Vaccination and adherence to Covid norms
- An average of 50,476 cases were reported in India per day last week. On Wednesday, India reported 30,615 fresh cases

3.63%
WAS LAST WEEK'S AVERAGE TEST POSITIVITY RATE

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EXPRESS READ

Crash helmets must for kids on motorcycles

New Delhi: Use of crash helmets and other safety measures have been made must for kids below the age of 4 on motorcycles. P10

Probe on ex-NSE chief's mystery baba?

Centre rubbishes her claim as cock-and-bull story, says e-mails point at criminal conduct

SHAHID FARIDI @new delhi

THE Centre may order a probe into charges that former CEO & MD of NSE Chitra Ramkrishna shared confidential information about India's largest stock exchange with a mysterious outsider, whom she described as a *Siddha-Purush* without a physical persona who lived in the Himalayas and communicated with her only through email.

Market regulator Sebi, while investigating an alleged co-location scam by NSE, stumbled upon emails exchanged between Ramkrishna and the mystery baba. Forensic examination of Ramkrishna's computer by Ernst & Young revealed emails from the so-called *Siddha Purush* advising her on operational matters, including appointments to key posts, and she sharing sensitive plans and projections with him.

Ramkrishna said she met the *Siddha-Purush* on the banks of river Ganga 20 years ago and he gave her no locational co-ordinates but she took his guidance on many personal and professional matters. She said, "Their spiritual powers do not require them

to have any such physical co-ordinates. Along the way, he would manifest at will and I did not have any locational co-ordinates, I requested Him for a way in which I could seek His guidance whenever I felt the need. Accordingly, He gave me an id on which I could send my requests."

Government sources rubbished the 'cock and bull' *Siddha-Purush* story put forward by Ramkrishna in her defence and said emails recovered during investigation *prima facie* establish a criminal conduct on her part, and an investigation would be ordered to find out the identity of the unknown person as the matter concerns financial security of the country.

CONTINUED ON: P10

daCunha/AB/796

Advocate: Students' welfare in MLA-headed panel is draconian

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

CONTENDING that neither the Karnataka Education Act nor the rules framed under the Act delegate powers to the College Development Committee (CDC) to prescribe any uniform, senior advocate Ravivarma Kumar on Wednesday argued before the Karnataka High Court that entrusting the welfare of students to CDC headed by an MLA or MP belonging to a political party or ideology is a death note to democracy.

Kumar, representing petitioner-students who have questioned the order issued by the state government on February 5, 2022 banning hijab, argued that the CDC was constituted to utilise grants, maintain academic standards and develop infrastructure, and not for welfare of students.

By any stretch of imagination, CDC cannot prescribe uniforms or entrust to use 'police powers' to discipline the students. "An MLA or MP cannot be entrusted with any power either under the statute or under the Constitution," he said. P4

Students of Maharani College in Bengaluru return to campus after colleges reopened on Wednesday | SHRIRAM BN

Over 700 pen open letter on hijab row

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

MORE than 700 people, including 500 lawyers, two former High Court judges and Karnataka State Backward Classes Commission former chairman Dr C S Dwarakanath, have written an open letter to the stakeholders in the hijab row. The signatories to the letter expressed concern over the recent Karnataka High Court's interim order, stating that it has led to many instances of Muslim women and girls facing public humiliation. With schools reopening, videos are being circulated across Karnataka of teachers and students being forced to remove their hijabs and burqas before entering school premises, they noted. P4

We may need separate bench for Karnataka, says CJI

With a large number of cases coming to the Supreme Court from Karnataka, CJI NV Ramana on Wednesday sarcastically remarked that a special bench would need to be constituted for matters from the State. The remarks were made after Solicitor General Tushar Mehta sought urgent listing of a case relating to compensation for those affected by mining in the state. "We will list it and may be we have to form a bench only for matters from Karnataka," the CJI commented.

Tension in Tumakuru

Chaos prevailed at the century-old Government Empress PU College for Girls in Tumakuru when a group of students protested on being denied entry into the campus wearing the hijab.

Vijayapura students protest

At Government PU college in Vijayapura, students staged a flash protest after they were asked to remove the hijab. "Hijab is the first priority for us and exams are next," said the students.

Upper Bhadra gets national project status

The national project tag will help us in getting Rs 12,500 crore from the Centre and speed up the ambitious irrigation project that will transform central Karnataka
Basavaraj Bommai, Chief Minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chitradurga

CHIEF Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Wednesday announced that the high-powered committee of the Centre gave national project status to the Upper Bhadra Project on Tuesday.

Bommai said this is the first project in the state to get the status and this will change the irrigation scenario of central Karnataka.

"The national project tag will help us in getting Rs 12,500 crore from the Centre and speed up the ambitious irrigation project that will transform central Karnataka from being water scarce to water rich," he said.

Recollecting the timeline of the project, he said, "It was former CM BS Yediyurappa who assigned me the task of making Karnataka water rich by utilising the excess water available in Krishna and Cauvery basins effectively. We also took up the Upper Bhadra Project in 2009. Water is now flowing to Vani Vilas Sagar Dam, which has made the region water rich."

He added that the government is committed to protect its water rights. "We will also start water conservation programmes to help the state have bountiful resources," he added. Bommai thanked PM Narendra Modi and Union Water Resources Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat for giving the national project status to the Upper Bhadra Project.

No signs of Russian troop pullout: US

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

A day after Russia announced that it was drawing down some of the 1,30,000 troops it had deployed near the Ukraine borders, Ukraine, the US and the Nato said they are yet to see any signs of Russian troops pullout.

"Unfortunately there's a difference between what Russia says, and what it does, and what we're seeing is no meaningful pullback," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said. He warned that the threat of war has not receded and Russia can still invade Ukraine any moment given the number of troops still at the border. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy similarly dismissed the Russian withdrawal claims, noting the lack of evidence. But Russia made further claims of withdrawal on Tuesday, saying it was pulling troops from Crimea after a military exercise.

India is contemplating running direct flights to the Ukraine capital to evacuate citizens. At present, there are no direct flights to Kyiv. As panic gripped Indians there and their families back home, the MEA set up a control room to provide information and assistance.

(With inputs from agencies)

CONG, BJP MLAs ALMOST COME TO BLOWS OVER TRICOLOUR ROW

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

IT was a virtual war zone in the Karnataka Assembly on Wednesday as Congress and BJP MLAs almost came to blows, with opposition party members demanding the dismissal of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister KS Eshwarappa from the cabinet and a sedition case against him for his alleged remarks that the saffron flag (Bhagawa Dhwaja) would be hoisted at the Red Fort.

At one point, as Congress MLAs rushed towards the treasury benches, the situation was so tense that the marshals had to be called in to stand as a barrier between the two groups.

The ruckus started with Opposition Leader Siddaramiah seeking to move an adjournment motion against the minister's statement. "Eshwarappa is a senior minister. He has insulted the national flag," he said. P4

Congress MLAs protest against RDPR Minister KS Eshwarappa in the well of the House holding the Tricolour on Wednesday

DISCO KING BAPPI LAHIRI DIES

Singer-composer who popularised disco music in India in the 80s and 90s succumbed to multiple health issues | P9

Chennaveera Kanavi passes away at 93

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Dharwad

RENOWNED poet and writer **Chennaveera Kanavi** passed away at 93, here on Wednesday.

He was being treated at a private hospital for the last one month after being tested positive for Covid and age-related health issues. The last rites were conducted as per Lingayat traditions with police honours at his farmhouse near Kelgeri.

While Kanavi was in hospital, the demand to bestow him with the Rashtrakavi title grew P5

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